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September 30, 1965

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: ABM Briefing

1. The Army presented its briefing on the ABM light area defense to a group composed of Assistant Secretary of the Army, DDR&E, Willis Hawkins; Assistant Secretary of Defense, Systems Analysis, Dr. Enthoven and Assistant Secretary of Defense, DDR&E, John Foster. I was also invited to participate.

2. The presentation, which I will not attempt to recount here at any length, followed the lines which you are familiar with. (Specifically, in summary, that a limited ABM defense comprising point defense combined with area defense can provide a major degree of protection against future, relatively light attacks against the US. The principal focus of the presentation was based upon a projection of Chinese capabilities through 1985. These estimates were based upon a detailed study of intelligence information combined with alternative projections of Chinese economic capacities in turn based upon alternative political assumptions. These projections resulted in estimated Chinese strategic nuclear capability ranging from a high of over 300 warheads to a low of approximately 150 by 1985. The conclusion of the Army study is that the light area defense could promise almost complete protection against light attacks of the sort estimated to be within Chinese capabilities through 1985.)

3. The analysis and presentation was complicated and one would want to study the assumptions carefully before reaching final conclusions as to the validity of the case made. In general, however, the case appeared persuasive. For example, as a projection of effectiveness of the system it is estimated that without an ABM the Chinese could exact 100 million casualties by 1985; with an ABM, making what

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are purported to be conservative estimates, the Chinese could expect to exact between 0 to 5 million casualties.

4. I focussed on two questions which have particularly troubled us over the past several weeks in our own analysis of this issue:

a. Would deployment of such a system be destabilizing vis-a-vis the Soviets? The conclusion of the study is that it would not. When I asked the basis for this conclusion the answer was that against a large and sophisticated inventory which the Soviets are presumed to have by the mid-70's, the ABM would have only limited effect and the US would still be deterred by the enormous destruction which the Soviet offensive missiles could exact. Curiously the Army's presentation also explicitly concludes that the ABM system should be supported because of its military utility against the Soviets. I pointed out that this presentation sounded contradictory. Either the system was militarily effective against the Soviets, in which case it would tend to be destabilizing, or it did not have a major military effect against the Soviets, in which case it might or might not be destabilizing.

b. Are we required to make the deployment decision as a part of the 1967 budget? The contention in some quarters is that the Chinese threat does not warrant a decision being taken in the 1967 budget. [

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They thus argue that it is none too early to begin the development of the ABM system. Second, it is argued that our intelligence lead time with regard to the Chinese is very poor. In some circumstances it is argued that we

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could lag as much as two years behind in our knowledge of actual Chinese accomplishments. If this is true, it is argued we should begin without delay to deploy a system since even conservative estimates of Chinese technology and productive capacity suggests that they could have a moderate missile capacity by the time an ABM system was fully deployed even assuming a decision is taken in the 1967 budget. Another variant of this argument is that since we may not have much advance warning of Chinese missile capability we should reduce the long lead time involved in deployment of an ABM system by beginning financing in the 1967 budget.

5. Most of the questions came from John Foster, who appeared skeptical of some of the Army's calculations. However, when we talked after the meeting it seemed clear that he favored an ABM deployment.

6. I have suggested to Enthoven that it might be useful if we could get the Secretary, together with a very limited number of top State Department people, briefed by Enthoven, on the technological capabilities of the light area defense system and projections which underlie the proposals which are now moving forward in Defense. The final Army presentation will be made to the Secretary of Defense on October 8 and I would expect that we would shortly thereafter have Mr. McNamara's decision. I am informally exploring the feasibility of setting aside an hour or an hour and a half of the Secretary's time for the suggested briefing and will check prior to making any formal proposal to Enthoven.

cc: C - Ambassador Thompson
G/PM - Mr. Kitchen
Mr. Sloss

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